



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 8, 2019

Gun Ownership Increasing in Europe Following Terror Attacks

Nine days after the attack in the Christmas market in the French city of Strasbourg last December in which an Islamic terrorist killed five and wounded 11, a Washington think tank [reported](#) that similar attacks were likely to continue. The terrorist, Cherif Chekatt (who was killed in a subsequent shootout with police), had previously pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq.



The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, declared that European citizens would face a continuing “significant threat” of similar attacks: “The threat of attacks from groups like the Islamic State and al Qaeda to ... the United Kingdom and France is at one of the highest levels [since the 9/11 attacks],” adding that the number of such attacks — foiled, failed and successful — surged more than 700 percent between 2007 and 2017.

This has put the average citizen living in Great Britain and continental Europe in a desperate quandary: With highly restrictive gun laws and a growing sense that local police can’t protect them from such attacks, many are turning to themselves for safety. Despite strict gun laws often requiring a year of supervised training as well as psychological testing, the ownership and use of personal firearms is growing rapidly in Europe. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted, “Gun ownership is rising across Europe ... spurred by insecurity arising from terrorist attacks, many with firearms.”

Worldwide, private ownership of firearms rose by 32 percent in the decade through 2017, according to the Small Arms Survey, an independent research project located in Geneva, Switzerland. In Europe, that ownership has been equally rapid, despite the difficulty of obtaining permits to own guns.

As the demand has grown, so has the supply, mostly through the “Deep Web,” also known as the “dark web,” the “invisible web,” or the “hidden web.” This is the part of the Internet that is off-limits to traditional search engines; where illicit trading takes place at such locations as the infamous drug bazaar Silk Road. According to the Rand Corporation, “Europe represents the largest market for arms trade on the dark web, generating revenues that are around five times higher than the U.S.” Since America’s gun industry generates in excess of \$15 billion in annual sales, the dark web is responsible for upwards of \$75 billion in firearms sales annually in Europe, as citizens increasingly look to themselves for their personal safety.

The flood of illicit (that is to say, non-government-approved) firearms is exploding, with Small Arms Survey estimating there are nearly a billion firearms held in private hands, with almost 100 million of them in Europe.

The British tabloid *Daily Mail* expressed concern over the number of those firearms that are flooding into the country despite the best efforts of local police to keep them out. The head of Britain’s task force for serious and organized crime, Chief Constable Andy Cooke, told the *Daily Mail* that the number of firearms rose significantly in 2018 and “will continue to go up in 2019.”



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Cooke is doing all he can to stop the flow, but his efforts are puny compared to the supply demanded by citizens increasingly concerned over their personal safety: “We are doing all we can. We are not in a position to stop it any time soon.... The problem is such that despite a number of excellent firearms seizures, I expect the rise in supply to be a continuing issue.”

Naturally, there is much official handwringing over the false notion that more guns will equal more crime. But history has repeatedly shown that greater private ownership and use of firearms by individual citizens has the opposite effect. Over time, the combination of the growing terrorist threat and growing personal responsibility resulting in increased private ownership of firearms will give criminals pause. In the recent past, those criminals knew they had a defenseless target. As ownership and use of private firearms grows, those criminals will increasingly face an existential moment as they consider committing a crime. When they realize they no longer have a monopoly on firearms, violent crime will decline.

An Ivy League graduate and former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [LightFromTheRight.com](#), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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